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STUDIES IN FURNITURE DESIGN.

SECOND PARALLEL.—HINDOO—INDIAN.

THE furniture of the Hindoo's was singularly limited as to the quantity used in the fitting of private homes; but as if to compensate in a measure for this lack of domestic furnishing, there was expended upon the pieces an amount of talent and labor and money, that made them unrivalled in that particular manner of decoration for which India has always been so justly famed.

The wood that was almost universally employed was the *shisham*, or blackwood, finished dull, without the polishing that we are disposed to give everything in modern furniture, whether it be suited to it or not. The carvings, of which there

was a great profusion, were elaborate and plentiful, no corner and no panel was allowed to remain plain, the minutest figures were given with the most faithful accuracy, the expressions upon the countenances of the little images were marked with life, and their every action conveyed the intent of the designer, the passion desired to be portrayed by the artist. Nor did this skill and wish to ornament stop short at furniture proper, but extended to the lesser things that went to make up the knick-knacks of the house; vases, inkstands and the multitudinous variety of ornamental conceptions, the bringing forth of which was a spontaneous effort on the part of the Indian artist.

Glancing rapidly over the woods used by these people, we find, in addition to the blackwood just mentioned and which in itself made up about half of the manufactured Indian articles, a limited collection of other names, probably little known to the majority of readers, and infrequently seen outside the borders of the producing country.

The *asana*, *syandana*, *sandalwood*, *suradaru* (a kind of pine) and *teak*, are known to have been used in independent pieces of work, seldom, if ever, in combination with the *sinsapa*, the native name of the black wood.

Of all these, sandalwood is known to us most familiarly. Its delightful odor creates for it a romantic and true Oriental flavor; we treasure the delicate articles that come to us, carved from its precious bark, and we can readily picture the Hindoo carver at his labors over the morsels we hold in our hands. Large pieces of sandalwood are not often seen in Western countries, and we can hardly realize the appearance and the magnificence of a bedstead, for instance, made entirely from it, carved with the most wonderful skill, inlaid with gold and jewels, redolent of the most delicious scents, and worth inestimable sums to manufacture. The ancient emperors, and shahs, and rajahs were not unfamiliar to such luxury, and while we may not expect to see that same magnificence existing in the present, we find a worthy successor in the ivory bedstead presented to the Prince of Wales, and another of silver, chased and graven, and hung with red and yellow needlework and embroidery.

The early bedsteads resembled in some particulars those of the Egyptians, having no head or footboard (we speak of course of the average bed-

stead), and being raised but a short distance from the floor. The mattress rested upon a netting of thongs or ropes stretched between the head and foot of the frame, and in some instances having also broad bands of woven material extending across its width, or again, the substitution of both by planks or boards of wood or ivory. The legs and sides were ornamented and carved, and frequently lacquered, the latter still a popular means of decoration.

Chairs were never very much used by the natives, they sat upon the floor or mats, straw, or the dirt, according to their several grades of social status. In fact so meagre are the records of this useful article of modern furnishing, that we are obliged to rely for our information upon the sculptured remains of thrones and the traditions or

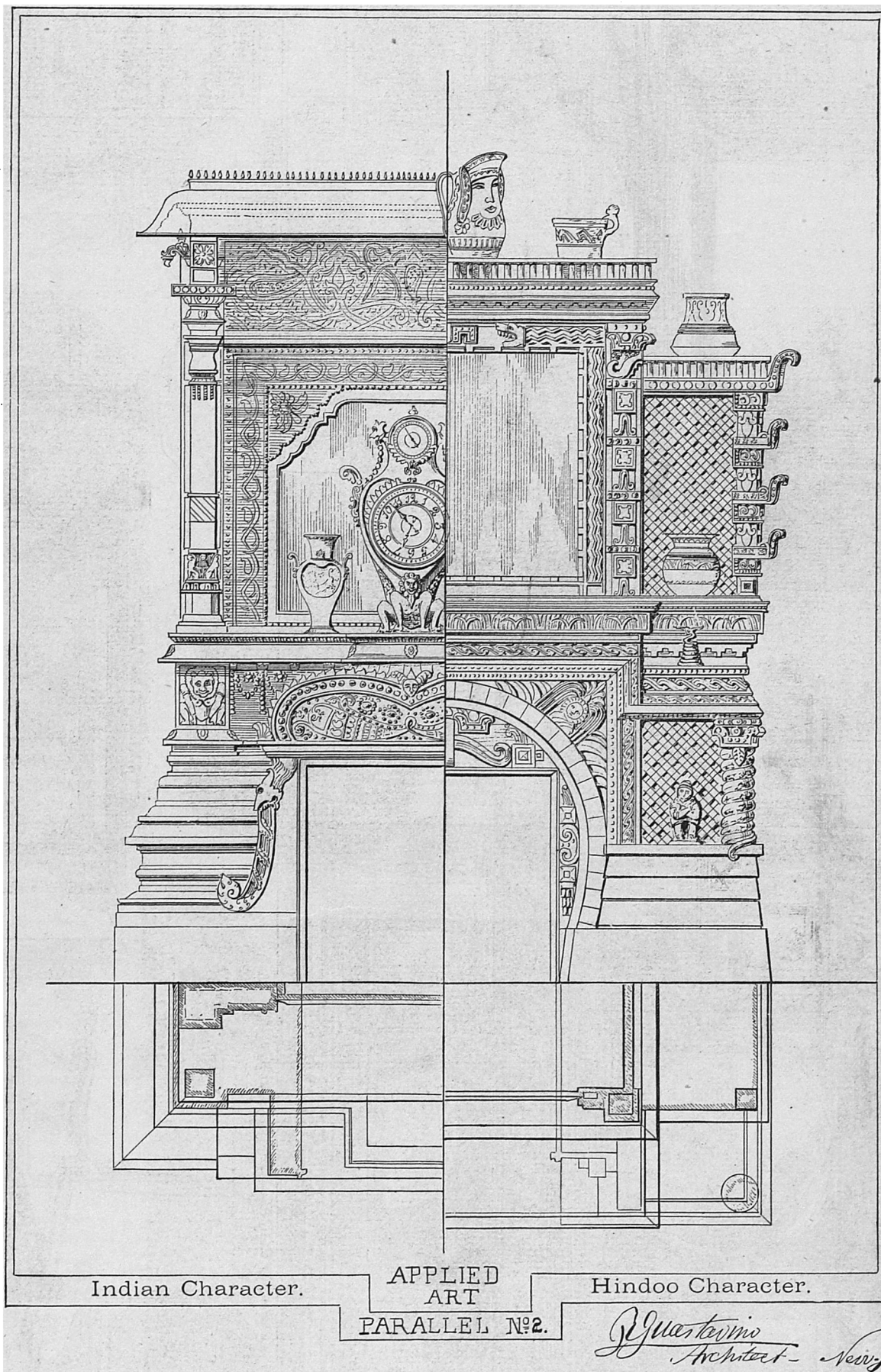
must have agreed with the color peculiar to the planet under which the anticipated occupant was born. For example, blue stone was significant of the planet Saturn, and yellow could refer to nothing but Venus. Crystal was admissible in all cases, and its purity of color gave some reason to believe it would be inductive of perpetual good. Sedan chairs or thrones that were intended to be carried about upon the shoulders of attendants, were of a light ivory frame work with silk hangings. There was one throne that deserves mention, though it was a modern one. It was known as the "Peacock Throne," and was made for the Emperor, Shah Jahan, A.D. 1627. A peacock with spread tail formed the back, and the natural colors of the bird were faithfully followed in sapphires, emeralds, rubies, topazes and enamel. The

body of the throne was so thickly set with diamonds and other precious stones, that the material of its foundation was not distinguishable. The total cost of this trifle was \$30,000,000, and naturally enough when Delhi capitulated in 1738 to Nadir, that enterprising conqueror absorbed the throne, and it has never been seen since.

Lac work is so familiarly and directly associated in our mind with Hindoo skill, that we naturally look for some noticeable and wonderful productions. The labor is so universal that it is difficult to locate the headquarters of the craft in any one place, although it may be said that the division is drawn between the large cities, and the back towns in the quality of the productions, the better and more expensive coming from the more densely populated sections.

Dr. Birdwood, in referring to this branch of Indian industry, says: "The variegated balls and sticks are made by twisting variously colored melted sealing-wax round and round the stick or ball from top to bottom, in alternate bands. Then the stick or ball is held before the fire, and with a needle or pin short lines are here and there drawn perpendicularly through the bands of sealing wax, drawing the different colors into each other, when the stick or ball is rapidly rolled on a cool, smooth surface, and that intricately variegated effect is produced which is so puzzling until it is explained. The netted mats are made by allowing the thread of sealing-wax, twisted round a stick to cool, and then drawing off the whole coil, and breaking it into sections of three or four turns each, which are linked together into 'mats' of all sorts of variegated colors."

In the accompanying illustration of an over-mantel the Indian should be of many and brilliantly colored woods, inlaid profusely with metal and glass. The scroll beside the grate opening is of bronze or other metal. The panel over this opening bearing the cone or shawl pattern, is richly inlaid with glass, the clock upon the mantel-shelf is of metal. All the figures and ornaments beneath the shelf protrude. The borders about the mirror are handsomely inlaid with metal, the columns and figures are of wood. The cornice is intended to hang slightly over the top and forward, and has beneath it a richly decorated painted panel on wood or silk. In the side marked Hindoo, wood of one kind only is employed, and with no ornament but carving.



fables concerning these official resting-places of the Indian kings.

The Hindoos are believed to have been the first to have utilized the humbler grades of living creatures to the purposes of furniture. We have seen in the article on Egypt and Assyria, that the Assyrian arm-chairs were supported frequently by the horse or lion, but in addition to making the same use of these, the Hindoos extended the imitation of animal kind to the elephant, the antelope, the goose and the peacock.

The materials of thrones were usually of gold, silver and copper, iron never, and stone only under certain limited restrictions. Sand stone was forbidden, and if any stone was employed, its color